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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 000192

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DEPT FOR EB/TPP/ABT, OES/PCI, AND AF/S
DEPT PASS EB/TPP/ABT - JFINN, GCLEMENTS, AND MKOCH
USDA FAS FOR OSTA/NTPMB/MICHAEL HENNEY AND ANTHONY GILBERT
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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [SF](#) [TBIO](#)

SUBJECT: PRETORIA'S PROPOSAL FOR BIOTECHNOLOGY FUNDS

REF: A) STATE 160639 B) PRET 000004

11. Summary: Embassy Pretoria's proposal for the FY 2008 Biotechnology Outreach Strategy Fund includes two activities to be held in South Africa. This proposal was developed among EST/Econ, PAS, and USDA/FAS. Additionally, we considered GSA and NGO representatives input to establish this proposal. Our proposal includes a set of activities in the Pretoria area for government officials and a separate set of activities in Cape Town for Parliament members. Additionally, since FAS/Pretoria is a regional post, covering much of Southern Africa, we would like to use the visit of this U.S. expert to the region to include travel to Madagascar after the activities in South Africa. The purpose of this trip would be to provide a basic biotechnology, biosafety, and food safety introduction to Malagasy officials and other stakeholders. Embassy Antananarivo will submit a separate proposal on which we collaborated and fully support. End Summary.

Pretoria

12. Building on progress made during last year's biotech outreach activities funded by EEB (see PRETORIA 000004); we would like to focus on capacity building and outreach within the Genetically Modified Organism Executive Council (GMO EC) and the Advisory Committee to the GMO EC.

Background

13. South Africa is a leading country in biotechnology research and development; however, the GMO EC, which makes the final decision on approval of events, lacks human capacity and the confidence to make well informed decisions.

14. Unlike in the United States, the South African GMO EC makes a single consensus decision based on recommendations from the Advisory Committee, an independent scientific committee, and recommendations from each ministry/agency represented on the GMO EC. The consensus nature of the GMO EC decision-making means that individual members can request additional data from applicants outside their particular areas of expertise or regulatory jurisdiction (as a hypothetical example, an economist from the Department of Trade and Industry may wish to have additional food safety data). This ad hoc rethinking at the GMO EC level is not always couched within any formal risk assessment framework. Only the final decision document is made public and all of the deliberations occur behind closed doors. As a result, the decision-making process is not transparent and it is difficult to reconstruct on what basis individual decisions are made.

Activity

15. We would like to propose an activity focused on the GMO EC and the Advisory Committee to build the risk-assessment competence of each of the individual member agencies. In many instances, the persons who are responsible for their agency's separate risk assessments are also the same individuals who sit on the GMO EC. Improving competence could make separate agency risk assessments pass through the GMO EC intact, and help ensure that these risk assessments are reflected in the final decision documents. Continuing to foster working relationships and technical exchanges between U.S. and South African regulators at the risk assessment level will benefit both countries.

16. Our visiting U.S. expert would spend 5 days conducting hands-on risk assessments with representatives of the GMO Executive Council and the Advisory Committee who evaluate risk assessments prepared by companies and research institutes submitting applications to the GMO Executive Council. The expert would also share information with working level government scientists about what USDA/FDA/EPA believes is most important and how they analyze the information.

Cape Town

17. The U.S. expert would travel to Cape Town, the seat of Parliament, for 5 days to meet with different Parliamentary Portfolio committees. These committees are the key players in passing laws and regulations relating to biotechnology. However, many committee members are not educated about biotechnology and often make decisions based on erroneous information.

18. The U.S. expert would provide an overview and introduction to biotechnology to committee members with appropriate portfolios.

PRETORIA 00000192 002 OF 002

The expert will meet separately with each committee to discuss issues relevant to their sectors. The targeted Portfolio Committees are:

Environment Portfolio Committee - Discuss aspects of biotechnology and biosafety as it relates to biodiversity. Additionally, reinforce the environmental gains from reduced soil erosion and decreased insecticide and herbicide use.

Agriculture Portfolio Committee - Discuss the latest in biotechnology such as stacked genes, etc. Provide information on global use of biotechnology. Encourage the development and commercialization of agbiotech products to meet the unique needs of South Africa.

Trade and Industry Portfolio Committee - Discuss trade issues relating to biotechnology, especially potential trade impacts of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

Science and Technology Portfolio Committee - Discuss how the United States supports biotech businesses and how to develop biotech businesses. Stress the global scientific consensus on the safety of agbiotech products demonstrated by the WTO final panel decision in the EU case.

19. These activities will meet two USG policy objectives: 1) assisting South Africa with capacity building for government officials, and 2) assisting South African researchers to prepare their risk assessments better. These activities will also indirectly assist US companies through USG advocacy for the future use of U.S. products and intellectual property in Africa.

110. Post proposes to hold special meetings for media contacts specifically associated with the agricultural and biotechnology sectors to discuss biotechnology regulations and developments in the United States. Additionally, PAS will arrange press opportunities for the visiting expert to engage journalists that cover agriculture, agribusiness and agbiotechnology issues. These could include roundtables with print media, one-on-one interviews, radio

call-in programs, etc.

¶11. Length of Program: Two weeks (5 days in Pretoria and 5 days in Cape Town, plus one weekend in between the two segments)

Cost:

TOTAL: \$15,500

Airfare (US - Johannesburg - Cape Town - US): \$4,500.00

Hotel and Per Diem (14 days): \$5,000.00

Meeting Rooms: \$4,000.00

Miscellaneous (materials, invitations, etc) \$2,000.00

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